

Persecutions of the Greek Old Calendarists by the Official Church During the First Years of the Calendar Innovation (1924–1928)*

by Nikolaos Mannes

“If they have persecuted me, they will also
persecute you” (St. John 15:20).



Introduction

Many times, and from many individuals, we have heard that those dubbed “Old Calendarists” are fanatics, express extreme views, and are generally characterized by their “zeal not according to knowledge”¹ and their lack of love. However, what we do not hear about from any of their detractors is the initial treatment of the Old Calendarists by the official [state] Church [of Greece]. The pre-

* This article, translated from the original Greek by Archimandrite Patapios, is taken from a published monograph, *Οἱ διωγμοὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων Παλαιομερολογιτῶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπίσημη Ἐκκλησία κατὰ τὰ πρῶτα ἔτη τῆς Ἡμερολογιακῆς Καινοτομίας (1924–1928)*, published in Athens in 2015 and taken from a lecture by the author, who is a public school teacher, noted religious and theological writer, and a pious family man and “Old Calendarist.” (Bracketed explanations or addenda in the text are those of the translator.)

¹ Cf. Romans 10:2—TRANS.

sent lecture deals with this latter issue.

In the entire history of the Church, you will not find a single example in which genuinely Orthodox Shepherds tormented and persecuted their opponents. Indeed, precisely the opposite happened. The Orthodox were invariably persecuted by the heretics. And the existence of this great historical truth—namely, that *justice is on the side of the persecuted and not of the persecutors*—alone suffices to demonstrate the correctness of the path that the Old Calendarists follow, regardless of the shortcomings of certain of them, whether in their assessments or in their actions.

The main purpose of the present lecture is to refute the following mistaken notion of Father Epiphanius Theodoropoulos († 1989), which many New Calendarists even *now* frequently repeat: “Let the Old Calendarists keep the Old Calendar, yet maintain communion with the [state] Church.”² But the Old Calendarists *did just this* at the very outset; there was no rupture, no walling-off, no division. They were simply seeking to celebrate the services according to the Old Calendar: they asked their parish Priests to minister to them according to the Old Calendar. And the response of the ruling Hierarchy? Persecutions, floggings, revilement, imprisonment, exile, defrockings, excommunications, and even killings. Thus, it is clearly demonstrated that the division created over the calendar reform in Greece was due solely and exclusively to the official Church, which, if nothing else, owes a profound apology to the Old Calendarists, not with words, but by a return to the right path from which it strayed, in this way justifying the struggle of the Old Calendarists, these faithful defenders of Orthodoxy.

Let us follow this timeline of violence by means of the irrefutable newspaper reports of the time. We will limit ourselves to the four-year period from 1924 to 1928, and even then without recounting all incidents, since neither one nor even ten lectures would suffice us to recount all the crimes of the official Church against our forebears.

1924

The first great Feast that fell after the calendar innovation was that of the Annunciation of the *Theotokos*. The Feast having passed according to the New Calendar, on the afternoon of April 6 many faithful gathered in various Churches in Greece to celebrate Ves-

² Letter to Nicodemus, July 22, 1971.

pers for the Feast according to the Old Calendar.

At the Metropolis of Athens, hundreds of faithful asked the Priests to celebrate the service. Metropolitan Chrysostomos (Papadopoulos),³ however, had expressly forbidden it, threatening to depose any Priest who dared to do such a thing. He even sent a detachment of police to disperse the multitude and seal the Church, ordering that all the other Churches also remain closed, so that the Annunciation could not be celebrated anywhere on the traditional Church Calendar!⁴

In Thessalonike, two thousand Christians gathered in the night in the Church of the Annunciation and sought to begin the Liturgy for the Feast. Metropolitan Gennadios (Alexiades) sent the police, who dispersed the crowd of faithful and arrested three individuals; the following day, he ordered that all the Churches be closed and that the customary Matins service not be chanted, in order to forestall any "irregularities [anything out of the ordinary]."⁵

From the very outset, the official Church showed such attitudes as these toward all who refused to accept the New Calendar. *Mere-ly to follow the Old Calendar was considered an offense*, and thus clergy were convicted on the charge of "Old Calendarism"! The first punishment of a clergyman was not slow in coming. In April or May of 1924, the seventy-two-year-old parish Priest of the Church of St. Demetrios in Aspropyrgos, Father Demetrios Dedes (1852–1927), was penalized with a ten-day suspension because he would not comply with the calendar innovation.⁶

Gradually, throughout Greece the official Church commenced persecutions, with the help of the state, in order to impose the innovation. See how *Pantainos*, the periodical of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, describes the situation:

³ Chrysostomos (Papadopoulos) (1868–1938), who served first as Metropolitan, and subsequently as Archbishop, of Athens from 1923 to 1938, was responsible for imposing the New Calendar on the Church of Greece in March of 1924. At his funeral, he was extolled for "his superhuman labors" on behalf of the approaching union of "all the Christian Churches, for which he put forth such great efforts" (Archimandrite Theokletos Strangas, *Ἐκκλησίας Ἑλλάδος Ἱστορία ἐκ πηγῶν ἀψευδῶν [1817–1967]* [History of the Church of Greece from reliable sources], Vol. III [Athens: 1971], p. 2160)—TRANS.

⁴ *Βραδυνή*, April 7, 1924; *Νέα Ἡμέρα*, April 7, 1924; *Σκρόπ*, April 7, 1924; *Ἐμπρός*, April 7, 1924.

⁵ *Ἐλεύθερος Λόγος*, April 7, 1927; *Ἐμπρός*, April 8, 1924; *Νέα Ἀλήθεια*, April 8, 1924.

⁶ *Πάντανος*, May 31, 1924.

All of the bitter and corrupt fruits that were and are daily produced by the inexplicable fervor to impose the New Calendar are attested by the daily improprieties and displays of violence, in which Churches are closed, Christians are kept from their religious obligations by military force, Priests are taken from island to island and tried for violating the mandates regarding the Calendar and for keeping to the established one—all of which are indubitably confirmed by documents and oral accounts.... Do you hold to the Old Calendar, that is, the Church Calendar handed down by the Fathers? If you are a layman, the Church is closed to you! You are prohibited from communing! Prison awaits you. Do you hold to the Calendar of your religion, of your Church, of your conscience? If you are a Priest, you are sentenced to suspension, deposition, and excommunication! Could the persecutors of Christians have exceeded this? What heresies have contrived more than this against the Orthodox?⁷

The great Feast of the Nativity of Christ arrived. The Old Calendarists decided to celebrate a vigil in the Church of St. Thera-pon in Goudi [a district of Athens]. Many people from Athens and the surrounding region gathered in the then small Church and began the service. However, the Metropolitan again sent soldiers to disperse the crowd, which exceeded two thousand or, according to others, three thousand people!⁸ At first an officer and two non-commissioned officers arrived and ordered the faithful to leave the Church. At the refusal of the faithful, the soldiers pulled out revolvers! Then they made their way into the sanctuary and approached the Priest, Father Parthenios of Iveron, with whom the following telling dialogue ensued:

'Father, what are you celebrating tonight?'

'The Liturgy for the Nativity of Christ,' answered the Priest.

'No,' said the official in indignation; 'you will celebrate the Liturgy for St. John.'⁹

At the Priest's insistence that he celebrate the Nativity service, the official ordered him to leave the Church, but Father Parthenios responded: "I am one of the clergy who have not acknowledged the calendar change. I have been called to officiate in this Church, and I will not leave until I have completed the Liturgy."¹⁰ Then one of the officials rushed to remove his *kalymmauchion* [the traditional hat of an Orthodox Priest], but the faithful intercepted him and,

⁷ Πάνταϊνος, September 27/October 10, 1924.

⁸ Ἐλεύθερος Λόγος, January 8, 1925; Ἐλεύθερον Βῆμα, January 8, 1925.

⁹ Σκρίπ, January 10, 1925. The *Synaxis* of St. John the Baptist falls on January 7—TRANS.

¹⁰ Σκρίπ, January 8, 1925.

reproaching them, forced the officers to retreat. After a short time, an automobile appeared with forty armed soldiers, and their commander ordered that the Liturgy be stopped. Since the Priest refused and there was a large crowd of the faithful who remained on his side, they remained idle, guarding the Church from outside. The following day, Chrysostomos (Papadopoulos) announced that he was going to depose Father Parthenios.¹¹

1925

A few days later, the feast of the Theophany arrived. A Vigil was celebrated in the Church of the two Sts. Theodore in Palaion Phaleron (today found within New Smyrna [a suburb of Athens]) with about 3,500 faithful participating. The police interfered once again, at the instigation of the innovating Metropolitan, and dispersed the crowd of believers by force. The "Association of the Orthodox" [as the defenders of the Church Calendar called themselves] had foreseen this, owing to the episodes on the Nativity Feast, and for this reason had planned for Vespers and Matins to be celebrated at night in the Church in question, but for the Divine Liturgy, with the service of the Great Blessing of Water, to be held in the Church of St. George Xerotagiaros in Palaion Phaleron, with the ever-memorable Priest, Father Ioannes Phloros, serving. However, troops stormed in and dispersed the crowd of faithful by force, arresting many of them.¹²

Let us read a characteristic excerpt describing the prohibition of services from the press of the time:

When he heard about the continuation of the service, the officer in charge was infuriated. Not one hour had passed when he issued a stern command to them to 'disperse in the name of the law' and, ordering those men under him, armed with bayonets, to fall upon the congregation, he first gave a signal and then began to administer blows with the butt of his weapon, the men under him thereafter following suit. Many received these blows, women's head-coverings were torn off, and the Icon stand outside the Church was thrown to the floor together with the Holy Icons and the table on which

¹¹ *Σφαίρα*, January 7, 1925; *Απογευματινή*, January 7, 1925; *Βραδινή*, January 7, 1925; *Σκρίπ*, January 8, 1925; *Απογευματινή*, January 8, 1925; *Ελεύθερον Βήμα*, January 8, 1925; *Ἔθνος*, January 8, 1925; *Σκρίπ*, January 9, 1925; *Ἐμπρός*, January 9, 1925; *Ἐλεύθερος Τύπος*, January 9, 1925; *Ἐλεύθερος Λόγος*, January 9, 1925; *Σκρίπ*, January 10, 1925; *Σκρίπ*, January 13, 1925.

¹² *Σκρίπ*, January 19, 1925.

candles were placed, while the people, offering no resistance, protested this vandalism.¹³

In the course of the remainder of the year, there were no serious incidents, since the notorious dictatorship of Pangalos¹⁴ intervened, and he proved more benevolent than the Hierarchs of the official Church.

1926

Already since 1924, the nuns of the Convent of Kechrovouni in Tenos had refused to accept the calendar innovation, at the behest of Elder Philotheos Zervakos. After applying much pressure, in the face of their persistent refusal Metropolitan Athanasios (Lebentopoulos) of Syros contrived another means. He threatened to depose the married Priest serving the convent, Father Matthew Evripiotes, if he continued to liturgize according to the Old Calendar. The Priest relented, and Abbess Evphrosyne and the nuns who refused to comply were indicted at the local ecclesiastical court, in October of 1925, where they were penalized with forfeiture of their positions within the convent and banishment. The nuns would not acknowledge the validity of the verdict, and for this reason the Metropolitan brought an accusation against them before the Synod of the official Church. The nuns were taken from the local constabulary and, having spent the night at the Tenos police station, were transferred to Athens. There, after a parody of a trial (which took place on April 1/14, 1926), they were condemned—except for the Abbess, who sought pardon—to deposition from the monastic rank and excommunication!¹⁵ The multitude of faithful who had gathered to offer support were dispersed by the police. The same day, at the convent, the nuns of like mind held a service of supplication in the cell of Nun Pelagia (Karouse) for a favorable outcome at the trial. (The convent was idiorhythmic.) During this service of supplication, Mother Hieronymia (Voutsinou), the temporary Abbess whom the innovating Metropolitan had instated, burst in,

¹³ Σκρίπ, January 25, 1925.

¹⁴ In June of 1925, Theodoros Pangalos (1878–1952) staged a coup and had himself installed as prime minister. He ruled Greece as a dictator from January 3–August 22, 1926—TRANS.

¹⁵ Σκρίπ, April 15, 1926; Έλληνική, April 15, 1926; Πολιτεία, April 15, 1926; Εμπρός, April 15, 1926; Νέα Ημέρα, April 15, 1926; Έλληνική, April 17, 1926.

along with some of the nuns who had accepted the New Calendar, as well as several laymen, and together they beat the nuns, leaving the Old Calendarist Nuns Magdalene and Athanasia unconscious from their blows.¹⁶

At the same time, the ecclesiastical periodicals of the official Church, such as *Ekklesia* and *Anaplasis*, as well as several secular newspapers, unleashed a barrage of attacks and insults against the Old Calendarists, whom they characterized as "fanatics," "religionists [religious zealots]," "charlatans," and "backward," to cite the most common epithets.

There were incidents at the Nativity Feast in 1926, primarily in the provinces. In Thessalonike, Metropolitan Gennadios again hindered the Orthodox from celebrating this great Feast, and when the multitude protested, the police were again mobilized.¹⁷ In Megara, the inhabitants "ignored the pressure and threats of the police, who until the last moment threatened to arrest and shoot anyone who dared to come to the [Nativity] Liturgy,"¹⁸ and bravely celebrated the feast. In Salamis and Karditsa, the police forces, in coöperation with the Church authorities, sealed the country Chapels, so that the genuine Orthodox finding themselves without a Church could not celebrate the Feast.

1927

In Nikete, on the peninsula of Chalkidike, on the eve of Theophany according to the Church Calendar, Father Hilarion from the Holy Mountain, who celebrated for the genuine Orthodox [Mt. Athos followed the Old Calendar], was arrested without any cause by the police. As a result, more than a thousand Old Calendarist residents surrounded the house in which the celebrant was detained, managing to free him. So, the following day they celebrated the Feast of Theophany. But their joy was short-lived, because a significant military force arrived, whose captain gathered the people in the village square and, after the New Calendarist Priest had denounced specific Old Calendarists, proceeded to arrest them. The twenty or so Christians who had been arrested were transferred to Polygyros, where they were detained for twenty days and sub-

¹⁶ *Ἑλληνοσύη*, April 25, 1926.

¹⁷ *Σκρίπ*, January 9, 1927.

¹⁸ *Σκρίπ*, January 10, 1927.

sequently condemned to a three-month incarceration.¹⁹ The Community of Mount Athos thus issued [under pressure] a communiqué which forbade Hieromonks from the Holy Mountain any longer to serve the Old Calendarists.²⁰

The year 1927 was also marked by the killing of the New Martyr Catherine Routes. In Mandra, Attica, the Old Calendarist faithful had prepared to celebrate a Vigil for the Feast of the Archangels. After Vespers, a group of gendarmes appeared, with the order to disperse the congregation and arrest the celebrant, Father Christophoros Psallidas. The faithful locked themselves in the Church and the gendarmes began wildly to beat on the doors, in order to break them down; at the same time, they broke the window panes, though their assault was hindered by the iron gratings on the windows. When the Vigil was over, the faithful exited the Church, shielding the Priest with their bodies. The gendarmes began to fire shots to intimidate them. More than forty shots were fired, and one bullet slightly wounded Angelike Katsarellou in the head. Then the gendarmes began to beat the faithful and the Priest with the butts of their rifles. Catherine Routes, a young mother of four children, was wounded severely in the head and transferred to the Annunciation Hospital, where she expired after a few days.²¹

Another woman, the New Martyr Charikleia Lioules, was arrested and imprisoned, where she died of the hardships a few months later, precisely on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, March 5, 1928. We read about her funeral in a newspaper of the time:

The following Monday, a majestic and compunctious funeral was held for the New Martyr Charikleia Lioules in Mandra of Eleusis. She who had been translated to the next life suffered a massive stroke as a consequence of the maltreatment that she underwent in prison, where she had been confined some months earlier for having participated in a Liturgy celebrated according to the Old Calendar. Her devotion to Holy Tradition was to the point of self-sacrifice. The prayers for the dead were read by Priest Basileios Sakellaropoulos, who was summoned from Athens for this purpose, and the funeral was a veritable pilgrimage of the faithful to a Saint.²²

¹⁹ *Τὰ Πάτρια*, Vol. V, pp. 38–46; *Τὸ Φῶς* (Thessalonike), January 20, 1927.

²⁰ *Τὸ Φῶς* (Thessalonike), January 22, 1927; *Μακεδονία*, January 22, 1927.

²¹ *Σκρίπ*, November 22, 1927; *Χρονικά*, November 22, 1927; *Ἐλεύθερος Λόγος*, November 23, 1927; *Νέα Ἡμέρα*, November 24, 1927; *Πολιτεία*, November 24, 1927; *Πρωΐα*, November 29, 1927.

²² *Σκρίπ*, November 24, 1927. See also *Σκρίπ*, April 30, 1928; *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τοῦ λαοῦ*, March 25, 1928.

An incident similar to the one in Mandra occurred in Thessalonike, where there were fortunately no deaths. On the Feast of St. Demetrios, the chief of the Kalevra police, at the behest of Metropolitan Gennadios, sealed the Church of the Three Hierarchs and placed a guard about it. But when the people began to gather outside the Church and protest, a strong police contingent stepped in and harshly beat the crowd, which consisted mainly of women and children.²³ Exactly the same thing happened during the Nativity Vigil in another, privately owned Church of the Old Calendarists in Thessalonike, dedicated to the *Eleousa* Icon.²⁴

1928

In February of 1928, again in Thessalonike, an unprecedented act of sacrilege occurred. A large detachment of police officers invaded the Church of the Three Hierarchs and dispersed the crowd, arresting a good many of the faithful. But not content with this, Second Lieutenant Sefhakes, of the second police division, had the audacity to rush into the Altar through the Beautiful Gates. Seizing the serving Priest, Father Akakios, a Hieromonk from Cyprus, who was just then finishing the service, he threw him out of the Altar, tearing his vestments.²⁵

On the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 1928, in Paiania (then Lio-pesi), there were new episodes. The officer in charge of the police station, Georges Maliarès, along with two gendarmes, burst into the Chapel of St. Marina and attempted to arrest the serving Priest, Father Parthenios the Hagiorite [an Athonite monk]. However, facing the villagers' firm defense of the Priest, he took out a revolver and threatened to shoot the faithful. He requested assistance from the police station in Koropio, and the Mayor of the community, Mr. Kolias, was arrested.²⁶

On April 6, 1928, an incredible event took place. Thousands of faithful, who had gathered in Piræus for the purpose of going to Tenos to celebrate the Annunciation of the *Theotokos* according to the Old Calendar, were informed, to their surprise, that in the wake of pressure from the Archdiocese of Athens, the Minis-

²³ *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τοῦ λαοῦ*, December 11, 1927.

²⁴ *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τοῦ λαοῦ*, January 14, 1928.

²⁵ *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τοῦ λαοῦ*, March 4, 1928.

²⁶ *Σκρίπτ*, March 6, 1928; March 7, 1928.

ter of the Interior had forbidden the boat to set sail! Immediately, hundreds of Orthodox, who had already purchased tickets worth seventy thousand drachmas, made haste to Athens by train and assembled outside Parliament to protest the unprecedented measure directed against them. They spread out their blankets there and sat down with their candles (which were their offerings to the *Panagia* [Mother of God]) in their hands, awaiting the decision to lift the embargo. This scene aroused the passersby to approach and inquire what was going on. At that very moment, however, an order was given and a police fire engine began to drench the crowd, in order to disperse it. Cries of protest were heard: "What have we done to deserve such a soaking? What wrong have we done to you? Why won't you allow us to go and venerate the *Panagia*?" And we go on to read in the aforementioned newspaper of the time:

The fire engine continued to douse the people. And yet the Old Calendarists, soaked to the skin, did not disperse. Only the small children whom the Old Calendarist mothers were carrying with them let out mournful cries. While the fire engine went on drenching the Old Calendarists, the soldiers prodded with bayonets those who, in order to keep from being soaked, tried to enter the precincts of Parliament to take refuge.²⁷

For the record, in the end the boat was not permitted to depart.

During Great Week, new persecutions took place. In Salamis, during the Liturgy of Great Thursday, a group of police, headed by Second Lieutenant Stathopoulos, burst into the Chapel of St. Athanasios in Boulki, in order to arrest the serving Priest, Father Gideon, the Prohegumen²⁸ of the Holy Monastery of Konstamonitou. The arrest was thwarted by the reaction of the faithful, and in revenge the police apprehended the monks Father Arsenios (Xerouchakes) and Father Nectarios (Koukoulakes), who continued even in jail to chant the Matins service of Great Friday.²⁹ In Menidi, the Orthodox summoned Father Basileios Sakellariopoulos to liturgize, but by order of Archbishop Chrysostomos the police arrested him and transferred him to the Department of Detention. About three hundred of the faithful were gathered there, and after protests they succeeded in gaining his release. However, Papadopoulos immediately ordered them to be rear-

²⁷ *Σημίτις*, April 7, 1928.

²⁸ The Superior of an idiorhythmic monastic community—TRANS.

²⁹ The Service of the Twelve Gospels—TRANS.

rested, along with the leader of the Old Calendarist community of Menidi.³⁰

In May, again in Thessalonike, there were new outrages. Let us see how a contemporary newspaper describes them:

This past week, the Orthodox Christians who follow the traditional festal calendar wanted to hold a procession in one of the private Churches belonging to their Orthodox association, in order to pray for an end to earthquakes, with the intention of raising money for the victims of a recent earthquake.³¹ This act greatly incensed the local Metropolitan, Gennadios, who ordered the police to prevent these Christians from holding a procession and to arrest the Priests and send them to prison in fetters. And indeed the police, who are happy to execute legal orders when they have the opportunity to ridicule the clergy in Church, after dispersing the Christians at bayonet point as though they were communists, arrested the Priests just as they were holding their procession. Treating them as though they were malefactors of the worst sort, they handcuffed them and confined them in jails, from which they transferred them to Athens the following day.³²

On being informed about the events, the editor of this publication went to the jail in Athens and demanded to know what had happened. He provides the following account in his newspaper:

After recounting the aforementioned events, the Priests portrayed the behavior of the police in the blackest terms and criticized the attitude of Metropolitan Gennadios and the other Hierarchs who persecute Priests for following the traditional calendar and refusing to become Latins, while allowing the proponents of various heresies freely to carry out their infernal work. He did not manage to finish his conversation with the Priests, since gendarmes came and arrested them at the bidding of Chrysostomos and drove them into the exile that he had appointed for them.

Persecutions continued throughout the year and throughout the country. On the night of August 14-15 (Old Style), in Litoselo, Phthiotis, gendarmes occupied the Church of St. George, forbidding the Priest and the faithful to celebrate the Liturgy. That autumn, refugees from the region of Serres, who had escaped from the slaughters of the Turks,³⁴ sent Venizelos³³ a memorandum, in

³⁰ Σημερ., April 15, 1928.

³¹ A magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck Corinth on April 22, 1928, devastating the city, causing twenty deaths, destroying three thousand homes, and leaving some fifteen thousand people homeless. — TRANS.

³² Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τοῦ λαοῦ, May 13, 1928.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ A reference to the genocide of the Greek population of Turkey in the

which they wrote, *inter alia*, the following:

We who have come to the hospitable land of Greece, our motherland, are truly at a loss over the harsh and inhuman measures taken against the genuine Orthodox. The Old Calendarists, as human beings, as Orthodox Christians, as Greek citizens, demand to be allowed what is practiced by those of other faiths, including Papists, Protestants, and Freemasons; to wit, the freedom to attend services in a particular Church with like-minded Priests. This is our desire, and we uphold this desire even with our blood. If, God forbid, the honorable government does not grant our request, we will ultimately, by all legal means, seek the protection of the League of Nations, which, in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne 'concerning religious minorities,' will oblige Greece, now our motherland, to grant the request of the Old Calendarists.³⁶

We conclude the year 1928 and this address with a discussion of the valiant Hieromonk, Father Arsenios (Sakellares). Father Arsenios, serving Priest of the villages of Pyrgos and Bitola in what was then the Diocese of Phthiotis, refused from the outset to accept the calendar innovation, and was for this reason arraigned and condemned to "deposition" in 1926. This Priest, who was certainly aware that his false deposition was illegal and null and void, continued to liturgize. Following a second arraignment, he was arrested, without a warrant, on the afternoon of April 9, 1928, and taken to the police station in Lamia. The following day, Sergeant Evstathios Arapostathes and one of the gendarmes put handcuffs on Father Arsenios. The former struggled to hold him down, while the latter cut his beard and hair with a large pair of scissors, and later on with clippers. This dreadful event, which took place at the recommendation of Metropolitan Iakovos (Papaioannou) of Phthiotis, did not discourage the genuine Orthodox, who put forward a clever response in a letter from one of their brethren to a newspaper of that era:

The martyric Hieromonk will undoubtedly continue to perform divers Priestly functions, even though he has been shorn. After all, various shaven Priests of the Archdiocese of Athens celebrate such services, with the difference being that the latter are shorn voluntarily in various barber-shops in the capital, whereas the hapless Arsenios was forcibly shorn in the Lamia police station.³⁷

early 1920s—TRANS.

³⁵ Eleutherios Venizelos (1864–1936), who served as prime minister of Greece for five terms, including the years 1928–32—TRANS.

³⁶ *Σχρίστ*, October 1, 1928.

³⁷ *Σχρίστ*, May 13, 1928. We might note that the desire of the state Church

After being shorn (*see photograph below*), Father Arsenios was indicted at the magistrates' court in Lamia, where he was sentenced to ninety-five days of imprisonment. However, he lodged an appeal, and a new trial was scheduled at the Court of



Appeals in Athens. The trial took place on November 28, and the fifty-six-year-old Hieromonk was sentenced to two months' imprisonment. He was led off and incarcerated at the Old Garrison [ὁ Παλαιὸς Στρατὼν, a complex of garrison cells] in Monasteraki, which were notorious for their squalor (about eight hundred inmates were crammed together in the confines of these jails, under squalid conditions characterized by dampness, vermin, drug abuse, access to weapons, and by daily altercations).³⁸ A

journalist succeeded in conducting an interview, in December of 1928, with the imprisoned Father Arsenios, which is worth our while to narrate as an epilogue to this address:

Without losing time going from one prison to another, I learned that here, in the jail cells of the Palaios Straton in Monasteraki, a certain Priest was incarcerated for liturgizing according to the Old Calendar:

'Whom are you looking for, sir?'

'Papa-Arsenios.'

'Come this way.'

I was led into the notorious *bodrum*,³⁹ from Venetian times, which serves as a lock-up for the punishment of crimes against humanity, and from a distance, without any clue as to his identity, I discerned a *rason* [cassock]-clad convict. As soon as I espied the figure of the incarcerated Father Arsenios, I came to halt; or, to put it better, was astounded. His whole countenance was imbued with serenity, a simple and radiant gaze, an attitude that attested to his faith—an imposing attitude, though one that nonetheless bore witness to the tribulation that he had undergone.

'Your blessing, Father,' I said to the Priest, whose visage I found un-

to modernize and accommodate to the prevailing trends of post-World War I Europe was marked not just by the calendar reform, but by a disdain for monasticism, the traditional dress of the clergy (and especially the robes, uncut hair, and beards of the clergy, accenting their avoidance of vanity and fashion), as well as the "mystical" theology of the Orthodox Church—TRANS.

³⁸ The public outcry over the squalor of this prison led to its demolition in 1929.

³⁹ A Turkish word denoting a dark underground jail devoid of ventilation—TRANS.

usually inspiring, and I bent down and kissed his right hand. The Priest of Christ reciprocated by greeting me with a smile that barely formed on his tightened lips, albeit with a paternal expression:

'The Lord bless you, my son.'

'Father, I am a journalist and, to tell you the truth, more than this I am gripped by a genuine curiosity to learn and hear [words] from the mouth of Your Reverence.

'First, what do you believe? Why did you become a Priest? Why do you not follow the New Calendar and the [other] innovations? Why are you [still] serving after your deposition? How do you view your sentence?

'And secondly: Will you continue in your stand? And for how long?'

'My son, I would be very happy [to respond], and I pray that my Lord and my God, Whom I serve and for Whose sake I am in jail, will grant me adequate words to answer your questions.'

And, making the sign of the Cross, he said with childlike naïveté and with an invisible and barely discernible sacred awe:

'I am a village Priest with limited education, though not to say uneducated. As a layman, I believed, and as a Priest, too, I believe our Symbol of Faith, "I believe in one God," that is, Holy Scripture—the Old and New Testaments—and all that our Holy Fathers have decreed in writing and handed down to our Church by Tradition. In three words: Scripture, the Traditions, and the Seven Œcumenical Synods. Such was my faith as a layman. My faith as a Priest, since our Holy God vouchsafed me, His useless, unworthy servant, to celebrate His Divine and sacred Mysteries that pass comprehension, includes that same faith that I had as a layman, as well as a confession, a formal pledge before God and men, "that I will preserve the Faith undefiled and my ecclesiastical duties exactly" as I received them and was taught them, without adding or subtracting anything, without hesitation or reservation, and unshakably. This I confessed, and this I have upheld. This I uphold, and with this faith I will die. Unworthy as I am, my son, I became a Priest of the Most High God, of Christ our God and Savior, and with His help I will remain so until death at my post. What else did you ask me, my son?'

'Why did you become a Priest?'

'Ah, that is a matter that I have not openly admitted until now. My mother and our Church instilled in me that the best thing that one can gain in this world is "to save his soul": to please God, to do noble and good deeds, and not to worship material things or the world, but God. My soul absorbed this lesson, and I became a Priest, not in order to earn my [daily] bread, as a professional Priest—as you more educated people say—but as a Priest of the Orthodox Church, in order to save my soul. And for this reason I am interested not in the decrees of Annas and Caiaphas, or in all that I would have had if I had been obedient to the impiety of changing the traditions, but in my flock, in the sheep that Christ has entrusted to me, His lowly and least servant. *That is why I do not follow the New Calendar: because it was not handed down to me when I became a Priest.* And also because my Holy Fathers hymned and worshipped God according to the Old Calendar and because the worship that they so offered to the "Holy Trinity and in honor of the Saints" was true, canonical, and holy, such that they became holy servants of God and entered

into the bosom of Abraham. Through their sanctity and Divinely inspired writings they also help those who wish to enter therein. I ask you, sir, in what way do we benefit from the innovation of the New Calendar, from a new *Paschalion*, from theatrical spectacles and trimmed hair, from liturgizing with Protestants, and whatever else, unknown to me, that the innovating Hierarchs intend—so as to take us to Paradise or to Hell, to God or to the Devil? Everything has a reason and serves some purpose in the Church. The sole and essential purpose of the Church is to make a Christian holy, that is, worthy of entering Paradise. And since all those who have to this day become holy, for nigh on two thousand years, and found Paradise with the Old Calendar, why should we want the New Calendar? What use will it be to us? Maybe, my son, you will ask me what the chairman of the Court of Appeals asked me at my trial the day before yesterday: “Do you know more than the Metropolitan, Father?” Here is my reply to you, my son. My Holy Fathers—Chrysostomos, Basil, Gregory, and so many others—know both about me, the unlettered Priest, and about the educated Metropolitan. And since all of the Fathers worshipped God according to the Old Calendar, all of the two thousand of them who constituted the seven Ecumenical Synods and who appointed how we Priests and laity should perform our duties, how can you want me to violate my oath, deny my Holy Fathers, and follow Hierarchs with trimmed hair and beards? This will never happen, I believe, my son, as I believe, being a Priest of the Most High and not having altered the things of the Church, but having guarded them as the apple of my eye. I remain, by the Grace of the Lord, a Priest of Christ, and am not a Priest of Hierarchs who trim their hair and beards. I will always serve in the House of God, as long as I am not hindered by the spears of Pilate, since I was deposed neither for immoral acts nor for heretical ideas. No, they cut my hair and beard and threw me into prison because I have kept and continue to keep my oath and my whole faith. And what do the Scriptures say? “We ought to obey God rather than men.”⁴⁰ Go, my son, and do likewise.⁴¹

After blessing me, that faithful and true Priest of Orthodoxy, worthy of admiration and love, departed for his sunless quarters in the jail, so that he might there serve God, Who strengthened him.⁴²

In concluding this address, I ought to emphasize that by presenting these documents pertaining to the persecutions of our forebears, it has not been my aim to engender hatred, but to expose hypocrisy; not to augment the rift [between Old and New Calendarists], but to put forth the truth, which sets people free and brings them closer together. Thank you very much.

⁴⁰ Acts 5:29.

⁴¹ Cf. St Luke 10:37.

⁴² *Σχολία*, April 28, 1928; May 11, 1928; June 12, 1928; November 29, 1928; November 30, 1928; December 2, 1928.